

THE 'DESCENT OF BLESSINGS': ECSTASY AND REVIVAL AMONG THE TIBETAN BON COMMUNITIES OF REB GONG

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ABSTRACT

Byin 'bebs 'the descent of blessings' is an ecstatic state and expression of faith among the Bon community in Reb gong County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, China, associated with the biannual Chos thog chen mo ritual. After 1958, the descent of blessings was not seen again until 1999. Bon adherants believe that blessings will descend if they are in the presence of a sufficiently powerful deity or *bla ma* and if their faith is strong enough. The ecstatic state is evident in dramatic changes in facial expressions, crying, laughing, dancing, jumping, the making of ritual gestures, and spontaneous uttering of prayers. This article introduces the Bon community of Reb gong, examines the descent of blessings in its ritual context, presents the phenomenon's recent history, and provides first-person accounts from those who have experienced the descent of blessings.

KEYWORDS

Bon, 'descent of blessings', Reb gong, religious ecstasy, religious revival, ritual dance

INTRODUCTION

The Reb gong region, an agricultural valley system on the northeast Tibetan Plateau, is home to several communities of people who profess adherence to the Bon religion.¹ Since the early twenty-first century, these communities have experienced the dramatic revival of a traditional expression of faith, a form of religious ecstasy known as *byin 'bebs* 'the descent of blessings', associated with the biannual Chos thog chen mo ritual. Local Bon devotees state that if someone has strong faith, and if they are in the presence of a sufficiently powerful deity or *bla ma*, *byin* 'blessings' will descend, causing them to experience an ecstatic state. Their face then contorts. They may cry, laugh, dance, jump, and make tantric ritual gestures with their hands. They may also speak uncontrollably in an unusual tone.

From 1958 to 1999, this phenomenon disappeared from the Bon communities of Reb gong. Its revival in the context of the Chos thog chen mo ritual held in the Bon communities of Reb gong is presented in this article, based on multi-sited fieldwork in Reb gong carried out between 2008 and 2012. In addition, I have had personal experience as a spectator at this ritual since I was a child – my village, Khyung po,² hosts the ritual every other year. During the stated fieldwork period I attended the ritual seven times through visits to four villages: Khyung po (three times), Gling rgya bon tshang ma³ (twice), Hor snyan Ri gong ma⁴ (once), and Spyi tshang A rgya sting⁵ (once). I observed, filmed, took photos of, and made notes about the ritual; collected relevant oral traditions; and conducted semi-structured interviews to complement my observational data.

My first key informant was A lags Nam mkha' bstan 'dzin, the second most important Bon *bla ma* in Reb gong's Bon brgya

¹ For further background on the Bon religion see Samten Karmay (2009), Kværne (1996 and 1985), <http://www.himalayabon.com>, and <http://theyungdrungbon.com/>.

² In Tho rgya Township, seventeen kilometers north of Reb gong County.

³ In Tho rgya Township.

⁴ In Hor nag Township, twelve kilometers northwest of Reb gong Town.

⁵ In Rgyal bo Township, five kilometers east of Reb gong Town.

Monastery – the most important Bon monastery in the area.⁶ I met A lags Nam mkha' bstan 'dzin in Beijing when I was travelling to Reb gong from Oslo for my second period of fieldwork in October 2011. He and my second key informant, Bstan pa dar rgyas, a monk from Bon brgya Monastery, provided much useful information about the ritual process. My other informants are a monk from Bon brgya Monastery and six *bon gshen* 'Bon ritual specialists' (see below), who first participated in the Chos thog chen mo ritual when they were young.⁷ I also interviewed laypeople who had experienced the descent of blessings, as well as those who had seen it but never experienced it personally. For these consultants, I provide only their sex and age, as well as interview dates, to better ensure their anonymity.

Tibetan terms are given in Wylie. For titles, personal names, and geographical names, I have capitalized the first letter of the first syllable. For text titles, I have given the complete title in italics. I have capitalized the first letter of the first syllable in the case where a Tibetan word begins a paragraph.⁸ Chinese terms are given in Hanyu Pinyin.

My study site, Reb gong,⁹ is located in eastern Qinghai Province, 188 kilometers southeast of Xining City, the provincial capital. Reb gong was declared a county in 1929 by the government of the Republic of China (1912-1949), at which time approximately ninety percent of the population was Tibetan, and the rest Han, Muslim, and Monguor (Tu).¹⁰ As time passed, immigration created a

⁶ Bon brgya Monastery, located in Dmag sar Village, Chu khog Township, was founded in 1981 by Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mthso. Bon brgya had eighty monks in 2013.

⁷ The first four *bon gshen* were Nyi ma (b. 1943), Bkra shis (b. 1950), Bstan 'dzin (b. 1952), and Zla ba (b. 1965). For the other two I provide only their sex, age, and interview dates, as they requested, in order to better ensure their anonymity.

⁸ Tibetan terms in the plural have not been written with –s to avoid confusion with the Tibetan spelling.

⁹ Reb gong (Tongren) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sgnon (Qinghai) Province, China.

¹⁰ Tongren xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (1990:26). The description of Reb gong provided here focuses on the contemporary administrative unit. For more on the pre-1912 extent of Reb gong as a cultural area, see Thurston (2012) and Yangdon Dhondup (2011).

demographic shift. In 1990, the county's population of 68,349 was approximately sixty-nine percent Tibetan, thirteen percent Han, eleven percent Monguor, and six percent Muslim,¹¹ with the remainder consisting of Mongol and Manchu residents.¹² In 2013, Reb gong County consisted of twelve townships and one town, Rong bo (Tongren), which is the political, economic, and cultural center of the county.

AN INDIGENOUS HISTORY OF BON IN REB GONG

According to Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho (2011), about 10,000 years ago, Gser thog lce 'byams, a Bon po scholar who is counted among the 'Dzam gling mkhas pa rgyan drug 'six great scholars of the human world', is believed to have spread the Bon religion in the area of contemporary Qinghai. During King Khri srong sde btsan's (ca. 742-797) reign, the Bon scholar Dran pa nam mkha'¹³ came to Reb gong and founded A ba ngos bzang Monastery.¹⁴ No physical traces of the monastery have been discovered.

During the reign of Glang dar ma,¹⁵ three brothers who were *grub thob pa* 'siddhas' – Spyi rting 'khor lo, Ngo mo ye shes mtsho rgyal, and Khyung dkar tshangs pa – fled religious persecution in Central Tibet and came to Reb gong. They first reached Chad lung thang where, local accounts say, a poisonous tree grew.¹⁶ People and

¹¹ Including members of the officially recognized Hui, Salar, and Bao'an nationalities.

¹² Tongren xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (1990:206).

¹³ This important figure in the Bon tradition is said to have been obliged to adopt Buddhism in order to save the Bon teaching from total eradication (Samten Karmay 2007:75-76; Kværne 1996:119, 128-129).

¹⁴ It is believed that the monastery was located about twenty-five kilometers north of the present Reb gong County seat, near a cave where Dran pa nam mkha' is said to have meditated (Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho 2011:278).

¹⁵ The name translates as 'Darma Ox'. Traditional accounts attribute the collapse of the Tibetan Empire to the apostasy of this king, who purportedly eliminated his brother, the monarch Khri ral pa can, in 838 (Kapstein 2006:79-80). Dates of the king's birth and death are unknown.

¹⁶ This oral account is widely known among *bon gshen* in Reb gong (see also Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho 2011:278).

animals that looked at the tree became blind, and those who stood underneath it died immediately. The three siddhas made *gtor ma*¹⁷ to destroy the tree and then, from its wood, they made 1,900 *phur bu* 'magic daggers' and many *sgrub rnga* 'ritual drums'. They then expressed the wish that there would be many Bon practitioners in Reb gong in the future. The Bon po in Reb gong are, therefore, now called the Reb gong bon mang phur thog stong dang dgu rgya 'The Bon Tantrist Collective of Reb gong, the 1,900 Ritual Dagger Holders'.¹⁸ After the destruction of the poisonous tree, the three brothers' fame spread throughout Reb gong.

Spyi rting 'khor lo resided in Spyi tshang Village,¹⁹ Ngo mo ye shes mtsho rgyal resided in Ngo mo Village,²⁰ and Khyung dkar tshangs ba resided in Khyung po Village. Their spiritual tradition and disciples spread throughout Reb gong.

During the eighteenth century, the fifth Panchen Bla ma (1663-1737)²¹ ordered the great Bon scholar, Shes rab rnam rgyal,²² to go to the area of contemporary Qinghai and strengthen the Bon religion there. As ordered, he went to Reb gong and sustained Bon brgya Monastery, G.yung drung kun khyab gling Monastery in the east, Gnam tseng zhwa dkar gling Monastery²³ in the north, and over twenty Bon villages.²⁴

During the time of Ma Bufang,²⁵ all the Bon monasteries,

¹⁷ Dough figures made mostly of *rtsam pa* 'barley flour' and butter, with forms that vary according to their purpose.

¹⁸ See www.rgbm123.com.

¹⁹ In Rgyal bo Township.

²⁰ In Rgyal bo Township.

²¹ The fifth Panchen Bla ma Blo bzang ye shes (1663-1737), was born in the Bru Family, an important Bon lineage family (Samten Karmay 2007:69-70).

²² Birth and death dates are unknown.

²³ These were all Bon monasteries in the contemporary Reb gong County, but no longer exist.

²⁴ Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho (2011:279).

²⁵ Ma Bufang (1903-1975) was born in Linxia, Gansu Province. From the age of nine, he was trained to be a military officer. He was a general when Qinghai Province was designated as a province in 1929. From 1939 to August of 1949, he was chairman of the Qinghai Provincial Government. There was much bloody conflict with Tibetans in Qinghai during his rule. The Communist Army arrived and defeated Ma Bufang's forces in August of 1949 in Lanzhou. Ma then escaped to Taiwan and later moved to Cairo. From 1957-1961, he was the ambassador to Saudi Arabia for Taiwan's Nationalist

except Bon brgya, were burned. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Bon brgya Monastery was completely destroyed.²⁶ Fortunately, some *bon gshen* practiced their religion in secret and were able to contribute to the revival of Bon in not only Reb gong, but other Tibetan areas as well, when religious freedoms were reinstated beginning in 1981.²⁷

The Bon villages in Reb gong fall into four main groups: Smad phyogs bon mang 'The Lower Bon Community', Stod phyogs bon mang 'The Upper Bon Community', Hor snyan bzang bon mang 'The Well-Respected Bon Community', and Yar nang bon mang 'The Higher Bon Community'.²⁸ The last group does not participate in the Chos thog chen mo ritual. The other three groups are further divided into five communities (*chos rtsa*) that host Chos thog chen mo.²⁹ These five communities consist of twenty-three villages that collectively have fifteen village temples, spread over Smad pa, Hor nag, Rgyal bo, and Chu khog townships.

THE CHOS THOG CHEN MO RITUAL

Chos thog chen mo is the colloquial term for this ritual, which is held in spring and autumn. The spring ritual may be referred to as *dpyid*

Party government. He died in 1975 in Saudi Arabia (*Qinghai Baike quanshu bianzuan weiyuanhui* 1998:430-431).

²⁶ Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho (2011:281).

²⁷ Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho (2011:282).

²⁸ Smad phyogs bon mang consists of five villages: Khyung po, Sdong skam, Gling rgya sa so ma, Zho 'ong nyin tha, and Dar grong. There are approximately 300 *bon gshen* in this group. The second group, Stod phyogs bon mang, consists of seven villages: Spyi tshang, A rgya sting, Gad pa skya bo, Spyi mkhar Gong ma, and Zhol ma, Rgyal bo ngo mo, and 'Gying ri. In total, there are about 300 *bon gshen* in this group. Snyan bzang bon mang consists of seven villages: Hor nag, Khyung po la kha, Stong chen, Ri gong ma, Zhol ma, No'u rong, and Rgyal ri. In total, there are about 200 *bon gshen* in this group. The final group, Yar nang bon mang, consists of Bon brgya, Mdo ba, and Dmag sar villages with a total of about 200 *bon gshen*.

²⁹ *Chos rtsa* literally means the root of *chos* 'religion' and refers to the five most important groups in the Bon community in Reb gong. Smad phyogs bon mang has two groups: Khyung bo thang and Gling rgya; Stod phyogs bon mang also has two groups: Rgyal bo and Spyi tshang; and Hor snyan bzang is one group. Each group consists of several villages.

chos 'the spring ritual', *rgya lo'i*³⁰ *sgrub chen* 'the great New Year ceremony', *smon lam sgrub chen* 'the great prayer ceremony', and *rgya lo'i chos thog* 'the ritual of New Year'. Two other names are given to the autumn Chos thog chen mo ritual: *bcu pa'i sgrub chen* 'the great ceremony of the tenth month', and *ston chos* 'the autumn ritual'. I have chosen to use the term Chos thog chen mo because it is the name most commonly used in everyday speech by local Bon adherents and because it applies to both the spring and autumn rituals.

Local oral tradition asserts that the Chos thog chen mo ritual was established by Spyi rting 'khor lo, Ngo mo ye shes mtsho rgyal, and Khyung dkar tshangs pa, the three siddhas discussed above.³¹ However, it only flourished several centuries later, during the lifetimes of Rtse zhig stong nyid bya 'phur,³² A lags Shes rab,³³ Drungs rims pa Shes rab rnam rgyal,³⁴ and Mkharr nag sku phreng.³⁵

The annual date of Chos thog chen mo was fixed as the fifth day of the first month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar, in order to commemorate the powerful *bon gshen* Rje mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356-1415),³⁶ who is said³⁷ to have become a vulture on that date, in order to see his successor Rin chen rgyal mtshan (b. 1360).³⁸ As a result, this date is considered the best time to invoke *yi*

³⁰ Lo sar 'New Year' is colloquially known to Reb gong locals as Rgya lo 'Chinese calendar'. This may be because it is celebrated by the inhabitants of A mdo according to the Chinese lunisolar calendar, not the Tibetan calendar.

³¹ Interview with Bkra shis and Nyi ma, October 2011.

³² The founder of Rtse zhig Monastery in Bsang chu (Xiahe) County in Gansu Province, three kilometers north of Bsang chu County Town. Bya phur is a well known Bon family lineage in Rnga ba, consequently, he might belong to that lineage.

³³ Oral tradition in Reb gong claims that he was master of many temples and monasteries in A mdo during the eleventh century.

³⁴ He was the nephew of A lags Shes rab, and traveled to Central Tibet and studied in Sman ri Monastery for many years. He also had close ties with the fifth Panchen Bla ma Blo bzang ye shes (1663-1737) (see note 21), who gave him a title and seal investing him with authority over the Bon po monasteries throughout A mdo. He became known as Rtse zhig Drungs rims pa.

³⁵ He is renowned in Reb gong as a famous *bon gshen*. I was unable to verify his birth and death dates.

³⁶ Samten Karmay (2007:66); Kværne (1991:373-437).

³⁷ According to Bstan pa dar rgyas.

³⁸ Bstan pa dar rgyas was unable to explain how becoming a vulture helped

dam 'tutelary deities'.³⁹ It is believed that prayers made on this day are easily answered. There is no particular religious reason to hold the autumn ritual on the eighth day of the tenth lunar month, however, according to my consultant Bkra shis, it is a good time to hold the ritual because there is no farmwork to do, and the weather is neither hot nor cold.

Bon villagers of Reb gong consider themselves the main recipients of merit from Chos thog chen mo. According to the Bon tradition, after Chos thog chen mo, the villagers' *'byung bzhi* 'four elements'⁴⁰ are balanced and under the protection of *yul lha gzhi bdag* 'local deities', *lha srin sde brgyad* 'the eight classes of gods and spirits', and *dgra lha* 'warrior spirits'. Furthermore, it is believed that the ritual brings timely rain.

Chos thog chen mo participants play various roles that Table 1, below, describes according to their descending order of importance in the ritual.

Table 1. Chos thog chen mo participants and their roles.

Title	Role
<i>bla ma</i>	Bon brgya dge legs lhun 'grub rgya mtsho is the most important Bon <i>bla ma</i> and Bon religious master in Reb gong. He attends on the first or second day of Chos thog chen mo to lead the <i>bon gshen</i> in the invocation of the deities, as well as to give the <i>dbang</i> 'empowerment' and <i>lung</i> 'reading transmission' of the sacred texts. ⁴¹

him see his successor.

³⁹ A tutelary deity is a guardian or protector of a particular person, lineage, place, nation, or culture.

⁴⁰ *Me* 'fire', *chu* 'water', *rlung* 'wind', and *sa* 'earth'. Sometimes there are four and sometimes there are five (the fifth being metal/ iron *lcags*). The Tibetan cosmological worldview holds that the world came into existence based on these four or five elements.

⁴¹ Bon brgya dge legs lhun 'grub rgya mtsho was born in 1935 in Dmag sar Village in the Yar nang bon mang group of Bon villages. He was recognized as the reincarnation of the G.yung drung phun tshog 'Jigs med dpal bzang po at the age of five. Skyang sprul Lung rtogs rgya mtsho and Bon rgya Sku skyes nam mkha' rgya mtsho were his key teachers. In 1942, he went to the Mda' chen dkar mo hermitage (located in Mzdo dge County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province), where he studied for five years before returning to Reb gong to teach. He was

<i>dge bskos</i> 'monastic disciplinarian'	The <i>bon gshen</i> in Reb gong elect two of their numbers for this role, who are then responsible for enforcing Chos thog chen mo rules.
<i>dbu mdzad</i> 'chanting master'	The chanting master leads the <i>bon gshen</i> 's chanting during the ritual. There are particular rhythms for each <i>las rim</i> 'session of practice', for instance, the rhythms for <i>zhi</i> 'peaceful' and <i>drag</i> 'wrathful' practice are very different. The chanting master ensures that the chants are performed correctly.
<i>khri pa bla ma</i> 'enthroned <i>bla ma</i> '	There is one enthroned <i>bla ma</i> for each day of Chos thog chen mo. They are responsible for financing that day of the ritual. ⁴² Every <i>bon gshen</i> must be an enthroned <i>bla ma</i> at least once in his lifetime. If there is no enthroned <i>bla ma</i> for the ritual, then the village holding Chos thog chen mo is responsible for the ritual expenses.
musicians	There are two drummers and, as all the chanting, except for <i>skyabs 'gro</i> , ⁴³ is accompanied by drumming, they must be physically fit. The drummers are usually selected from among the young <i>bon gshen</i> and have been chosen by the Bon mang to continue the drumming lineage of their family. Two <i>rgya ling</i> 'shawm' blowers participate. They are usually young <i>bon gshen</i> . The shawm are played when the <i>bon gshen</i> invoke the deities, when <i>bla ma</i> arrive, when <i>bon gshen</i> perform a ritual dance as a group, and during <i>ser phreng</i> 'procession of the <i>bon gshen</i> '. Two conch shell blowers and two <i>dung chen</i> 'great trumpet blowers' participate in the ritual. The conch shells are played to call people to the ritual early in the morning and when <i>bsang</i> 'fumigation' ⁴⁴ offerings are made. The trumpet is played during the practice

imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution. In 1980, he was ordered by the tenth Panchen Bla ma, Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1938-1989), to revive the Bon religious tradition in Qinghai. He is now the abbot of Bon brgya Monastery and the *bstan bdag* 'religious master' of all Bon communities in Reb gong (Tshul khrims bstan pa 'brug grags 2011:1-8).

⁴² Ritual expenses include bread, *rtsam pa*, butter, *tshogs rdzas* 'feast offerings', and *gyed*. The total cost is about 40,000 RMB.

⁴³ This refuge-taking scripture is chanted at the beginning of most rituals.

⁴⁴ A smoke offering of juniper branches, barley flour, and such other items as fruit and candies (Samten Karmay 2009:380-412).

	sessions and ritual dances.
<i>bon gshen</i>	Senior Bon po in Reb gong are known colloquially as <i>dpon</i> and a <i>khu bon po</i> , and more formally as <i>bon gshen</i> . These ritual specialists invoke deities. Their role thus corresponds to the Buddhist term <i>sngags pa</i> .
<i>mchod g.yog pa</i> and <i>mkha' mgo pa</i> 'ritual assistants'	There are six ritual assistants who do not usually chant. They make and/ or move <i>gtor ma</i> , blow conch shells during <i>bsang</i> offerings, and cook for the <i>bon gshen</i> .
<i>cham pa</i> 'ritual dancers'	Fourteen people perform ritual dances during Chos thog chen mo. They are chosen by the 'cham dpon 'dance master', and may sometimes belong to a family lineage of dancers. They cannot eat chili or garlic, walk under drainpipes, or sleep with their wives for twenty-five days prior to the the ritual. It is believed that calamity will befall them if they violate these rules.
<i>bskal len ba</i> 'recipients'	<i>Bskal len ba</i> are those who do not chant or participate in the ritual, such as students, children, and workers.

Chos thog chen mo lasts three days, and the procedure for each of the three days is much the same, except for the scripture chanted to invoke the main deity each day.⁴⁵ The first day is devoted to the peaceful aspect of the ritual, while the second and third days focus on the wrathful aspect. On the first day, the *bon gshen* chant a text devoted to Kun tu bzang po,⁴⁶ entitled *Snyan brgyud a gsal*

⁴⁵ The other scriptures chanted during Chos thog chen mo are identical for each of the three days of the ritual. They are *Tshe sgrub kyi gzungs sngags*, *Skyabs 'gro*, *Sprul sku Ta pi hri tsa'i gsol 'debs*, *Rnam mkhyen rgyal ba gshen rab la 'a zha gsang ba mdo sdud kyis bstod pa'i mdzad bcu*, *Sprul sku blo ldan snying po'i bsang gzhung*, and *Bstan srung rma rgyal pom ra'i bsang mchod gong 'og gnyis*, which are chanted before breakfast. After breakfast, the *bon gshen* chant *Sangs rgyas sman lha'i cho ga*, *Brgya rtza*, and *Rgyal yum byams ma chen mo'i sngags bstod*. In the afternoon, *bon gshen* chant *Tshogs 'khor*, *Bskang ba*, and later in the afternoon, *Dbal gsas kyi sngags*, all the *Bka' skyong bskul ba*, *Dmar lam zor gyi bsgrub pa*, *Gzir mnan bro yi bsgrub pa*, and *Phywa tshe g.yang gi bsgrub pa*.

⁴⁶ Kun tu bzang po (Sanskrit, Samantabhadraz) 'the All-good', is an important deity in both Buddhist and Bon traditions, especially in the Rnying ma pa and Bka' rgyud pa schools of the Buddhist tradition. In the Bon tradition, Kun tu bzang po has the status of *bon sku*, which literally means 'Body of Bon', i.e., the Ultimate Reality. He is regarded as the

'*phrul gyi lde mig ste/ kun bzang rgyal ba 'dus pa'i dkyil 'khor*, *The Mandala of the Form of Kun tu bzang po Called Rgyal ba'i 'dus pa*.⁴⁷ The chanting of this text is the central element of the first day of the ritual. That this day is devoted to the peaceful aspect is signified by slow melodious chanting accompanied by gentle music, which is pleasant to the ear, and by the costumes of the *bon gshen*, who do not wear hats.

On the second day, the *bon gshen* chant a ritual text devoted to Tshe dbang rig 'dzin⁴⁸ called *Tshe dbang gzhung bzhi'i sgrub pa*, *The Four Traditions of Tshe dbang rig 'dzin*. The chanting of this text is the most important part of the day. There is a short masked dance during the feast rite when Khro tshogs⁴⁹ is defeated. On the second day, the monastic disciplinarian reads out the *bca' yig*⁵⁰ 'official notice' and a *tshogs gtam*⁵¹ 'speech addressed to the assembly'.

On the third day of the spring Chos thog chen mo, *bon gshen* chant a scripture devoted to 'Bum pa,⁵² called *Yi dam dbang chen 'Bum pa'i dkyil 'khor*, *The Mandala of the Powerful Tutelary Deity*

supreme deity in the context of meditational practice, and the source of the lineage of the Zhang zhung snyan rgyud, Aural Transimission of Zhang zhung (Kværne 1996:29).

⁴⁷ See Kværne (1996:30-31, 59-61).

⁴⁸ Tshe dbang rig 'dzin, the 'knowledge holder', and 'master of long life' is regarded as a manifestation of Gsang ba 'das pa. Tshe dbang rig 'dzin lived in the eighth century and was the son of Dran pa nam mkha'. His teachings, rituals, and iconographic representations are grouped 'according to the tradition of Zhang zhung (*Zhang zhung ma*)', 'according to the tradition of India (*Rgya gar ma*)', and 'according to the tradition of Tibet (*bod yul ma*)' (Kværne 1996:120; Ramble 2007:125-129).

⁴⁹ *Khro* means 'wrathful' and *tshogs* translates as 'assembly'. Khro tshogs is a *gtor ma* shaped like a sheep's body. It is an offering to tutelary deities. This effigy is symbolically defeated by the deities represented in the masked dance, symbolizing the defeat of malevolent forces.

⁵⁰ The new *bca' yig* was written by A lags Bon brgya Dge legs lhun grub rgya mthso in 2011 and entitled *Reb gong bon mang phur thog stong dang dgu brgya'i bca' yig* (2011:230-250). Previously, there was no common *bca' yig* for the Bon communities in Reb gong. There are three key ideas in this new *bca' yig* of Bon in Reb gong: a brief history of Bon in Tibet and Bon in Reb gong, ritual regulations, and punishment for violating regulations. For an example of another *bca' yig* see Cech (1985:69-85).

⁵¹ A condensed form of *bca' yig* 'monastic rules'.

⁵² 'Bum pa is an important tutelary deity worshipped by Bon believers. His cult is especially popular in Khyung po, Gling rgya bon tshang ma, and Spyi tshang villages. According to Nyi ma, the teachings and rituals of this deity only exist in Reb gong.

'Bum pa. In the autumn ritual, a text called *Dbal gsas rngam pa'i dkyil 'khor*, *The Mandala of Fierce Dbal gsas*,⁵³ is chanted instead. The wrathful aspect of the ritual on these two days is signified by the wrathful music that accompanies the chanting and the *bon gshen*'s costumes. For example, *dkar mo khyung gshog* 'white hat depicting the wings of a garuda', *dkar mo rtse rgyan* 'white hat depicting a leftward turning swastika', *dom pag* 'a hat made from bear skin', and *gtsod rwa* 'a hat with the horn of an antelope depicted on it'⁵⁴ are worn. The main ritual dance, a focal activity of Chos thog chen mo, takes place on this day. It is during this ritual dance that the descent of blessings typically occurs.

The main activities of this day are the *spyān 'dren* 'ritual of invitation', *tshogs 'khor* 'the feast rite', and *zlog pa* 'ritual of dispelling'. During the invitation, the retinues of *lha* 'deities' and their *gzhal yas khang* 'divine mansions' are verbally *bskyed* 'generated' by the *bon gshen* who chant the *spyān 'dren* 'invitation', inviting all the gods to the main assembly hall, and especially into the mandala.⁵⁵ Next, the *bon gshen* make prostrations and *gshags pa* 'confessions'. Offerings to the deities then begin.

The *tshogs 'khor* 'feast rite' is a tantric ritual during which liquor and various foods including meat are first offered to the

⁵³ *Dbal gsas rngam pa* 'fierce piercing deity', is an important tutelary deity widely worshipped in the Bon tradition. The main ritual text of this deity is entitled *Dbal gsas rngam pa'i las rim* and is said to have been composed by *Dran pa nam mkha'*.

⁵⁴ The former two are supposedly the original hats of *bon gshen*, consequently, wearing them brings prosperity to the Bon religion. The latter two symbolize historical events important to the Bon tradition. Bon po were forbidden to wear their original religious hats during the two periods of decline in Bon. This was during the reigns of King *Gri gum btsan po* (the seventh or, according to some sources, eighth monarch of the Tibetan empire and the first to leave mortal remains (Kapstein 1996:38) and whose birth and death dates are unknown, and King *Khri srong sde btsan*. This explains why some practitioners wore *dom pags* and *gtsod rwa* to disguise their identity as Bon po and fled from Central Tibet to A mdo and Kham. These hats are typical for the *bon gshen* from Bon communities in Reb gong.

⁵⁵ This *gtor ma* represents the deities, including the peaceful deities *Kun tu bzang po*, *Tshe dbang rig 'dzin*, the tutelary deities *Dbal gsas* (for the autumn ritual), and 'Bum pa (for the spring ritual), and their retinues, as well as male and female protector deities. The peaceful ones are generally represented by cone shapes, while the wrathful ones are represented by triangular shapes.

deities, and then they are distributed to the practitioners and laypeople. The remainder is given to *gdon* 'ghosts' and *bgegs*⁵⁶ 'obstacle-creating spirits' by throwing them outside the village temple.

For Chos thog chen mo, the main offerings are Khro tshogs (see footnote forty-nine, above) and *tshogs rdzas* 'feast offerings'.⁵⁷ First, the *bon gshen* make offerings to the deities with Khro tshogs and the 'feast offerings', after which the remaining offerings are distributed among the *bon gshen* and laymen. Eating the feast offering and Khro tshogs is believed to protect against disease. Afterwards, the *bon gshen* begin making offerings to hungry ghosts and other beings. These offerings are made from the uneaten leftovers of the feast offering and the Khro tshogs.

The ritual of *zlog pa* 'dispelling negative forces' is a tantric ritual, for which a *zlog gtor*⁵⁸ is made. For Chos thog chen mo, the *bon gshen* perform *zlog pa* in autumn for the deity, Dbal gsas, and perform in spring for the deity, 'Bum pa. During the ritual, the *zlog gtor* is kept inside the main assembly hall until the ritual dance takes place on the third day. After the ritual dance is completed on that day, the *zlog gtor* is carried above people's heads and discarded at an intersection. It is believed that all negative forces are exorcised, dispersed, or driven back by the deity and their retinue that are embodied in the *zlog gtor*. In addition, the deity and their retinue go to places where sentient beings are suffering, particularly as a result of natural disasters, in order to relieve their pain.

When the *zlog gtor* is carried out from the main assembly hall by *mchod g.yog pa* 'ritual assistants', the first group begins dancing counterclockwise in a circle in the courtyard. The musicians and banner holders⁵⁹ walk in a circle. The *bon gshen* in the main

⁵⁶ Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las rgya mtsho (2002:1751).

⁵⁷ The feast offering usually consists of homemade bread, and a large amount of fruit, candy, and various *ka ra go re* 'biscuits'. These offerings are usually provided by the enthroned *bla ma* or collected from each household if there is no enthroned *bla ma*.

⁵⁸ *Zlog* literally means 'to expel' and *gtor* is the abridged form of *gtor ma*. *Zlog gtor* is a group of *gtor ma* representing the deities with their retinues comprised of male and female protector deities.

⁵⁹ The banners include a parasol, two *rgyal mtshan* 'victory banners', and

assembly hall ring bells and chant. The laypeople on the temple roof make *bsang* offerings and throw *rlung rta* 'wind horses' in the air.⁶⁰ The *bon gshen* then leave the main assembly hall and dance counterclockwise, circling the courtyard. After circling the courtyard once, all the *bon gshen* are seated. Next, two *keng rus* 'skeleton dancers' put a *gtor ma* representing negative forces in the courtyard center, and the *bon gshen* chant.

The main ritual dance is performed by masked dancers, who are always laymen who represent protector deities. It consists of individual and group dances depicting the deities Gshin rje yab yum, Mchod 'bul lha mo, Bdud lha mo, Sgra bla'i rgyal mo, Rma chen spom ra, Btsan Dmu dpon, Shel khrab can, Bya seng can, Gza' mgo dgu, and Keng rus (see Appendix One). Except for Gshin rje yab yum and the skeletons, the dancers strive to guide all sentient beings to the right path and kill enemies (thus liberating their souls). Their dance is a symbol that the Bon religion will prosper and create happiness for all sentient beings.

Gshin rje yab yum's dance is *dge sdug shan 'byed kyi gar 'cham* 'judgment dance' indicating that the deities judge right and wrong while dancing. They brandish swords in their right hands and hold *khram shing* 'tally boards'⁶¹ in their left hands. It is believed that the swords they hold slay all beings who do not know right from wrong, while they record the sins and virtuous deeds of all sentient beings on their tally boards.

The skeletons are servants of Gshin rje and Sgra bla'i rgyal mo in the dance. A lags Nam mkha' bstan 'dzin and Bstan pa dar rgyas told me that they symbolically offer the flesh, blood, and bones of the liberated enemies to protector deities. Among them, Sgra bla'i rgyal mo's dance is the most ferocious. While dancing, she constantly brandishes her sword quickly and erratically as compared to the slow, fluid movements of other deities. She runs to and fro, and then

two flags depicting Srid pa'i rgyal mo and Sgra bla'i rgyal mo (see Appendix One).

⁶⁰ A small square paper symbolizing well-being or good fortune that is thrown in the air (Samten Karmay 2009:413-23).

⁶¹ A wooden board featuring crossed lines that Gshen rje presumably uses to record the sins and virtuous deeds of all sentient beings.

collapses to the ground, her back arched, sweeping her sword in an arc above her head. The music that accompanies her dance is more intense than during other dance performances. 'Descent of blessings' is experienced during her performance, especially when her *bskyed pa* 'generation text'⁶² is read out.

After individual performances, all male and female protector deities, led by Srid pa'i rgyal mo and Dmu bdud 'byams, perform a dance intended to evoke a burning fire. Firstly Gshin rje, and then other dancers, cut the *zan ling* into pieces, put it in the *zlog gtor*, and then discard it as described above. Next, all *bon gshen* and dancers perform a short dance in the courtyard, symbolizing their joy at the defeat and expulsion of all enemies. They shout, "*Lha rgyal lo* 'The deities have won!'" and the dance is considered a success.

THE 'DESCENT OF BLESSINGS'

When observing Chos thog chen mo in November 2007, some women told me of their inexpressible faith, and that when they saw the ritual dance they felt like crying and shouting, but could not. In 2010, I observed ritual dances in two villages.⁶³ The ritual practice was the same as I had seen before, but laypeople's reactions differed. In 2007, people told me that they had powerful feelings of faith, and though they wanted to cry, they did not, while, in 2010, people went into an ecstatic state called the *byin 'bebs* 'the descent of blessings' during the ritual dance.

The 'descent of blessings' bears similarity to the spirit-medium⁶⁴ trance common in Reb gong. However, my consultant, Nyi ma, told me that it differs significantly in that a 'trance' occurs when a deity possesses a medium, through whom they

⁶² This text features instructions for the visualization transformation of the practitioners into the tutelary deity.

⁶³ I was in Gling rgya in November 2009 and in Khyung po in January 2010.

⁶⁴ The body of a *lha pa* 'medium' is believed to be possessed by local deities. The medium becomes the deities' mouthpiece through which the deities make their wishes known. The deities may also give prophetic answers to questions devotees ask them.

communicate with the laity. In contrast, the descent of blessings is not about possession. Rather, it occurs if people have strong faith and the deity or *bla ma* in whose presence they are is powerful enough to grant blessings. This can be seen from the literal meaning of the word *byin 'bebs*. *Byin* is an abbreviation of *byin rlabs*, which refers to the power or blessing of a *bla ma* or a deity granted to people, and *'bebs* is the present tense of *phab* meaning 'to cause to descend'.⁶⁵ Here it may signify 'to bless'.

People typically become ecstatic when the ritual dances take place, though sometimes during other moments in the ritual as well. In this state of ecstasy, people assume unusual facial expressions. Their face becomes pale. Some open their eyes wide while others close their eyes tightly. Some cry or laugh, while others dance, jump, and make ritual gestures.⁶⁶ Some shout, "*Rtsa ba'i bla ma*, Root *bla ma*!" "*Bla ma rin po che*, Precious *bla ma*,"⁶⁷ or "*Sgra bla'i rgyal mo*!"

Figure 1. Two women experience the descent of blessings at the appearance of *Sgra bla'i rgyal mo*.



⁶⁵ Pad ma rdo rje (2007:484).

⁶⁶ The two typical ritual gestures are the middle and ring fingers pressed to the palm with the thumb and the other two fingers extended, and the palms placed together and raised to the forehead. The former is done at the beginning of the ecstatic state and the latter at the end.

⁶⁷ These are two expressions people use when praying to their *bla ma*.

Nyi ma explained that a great *bla ma* or a great deity consecrates the minds of those with strong faith, and said that the heightened consciousness of those who experience this is very important. Because of the heightened consciousness while in a state of ecstasy, people become more compassionate and have an awakened mind by having relatively less hatred, ignorance, desire, arrogance, and jealousy. Both men and women experience the descent of blessings, but women are usually in the majority.

Figure 2. A *bon gshen* makes ritual gestures while in an ecstatic state.



This phenomenon became common in the five main Bon communities in Reb gong in about 2008. I asked many people why this phenomenon happened at this particular time, and I always got the same answer – people's faith had become stronger and purer. This explanation coincides with religious activities in Reb gong's Bon communities having become more organized and religious institutions more systematic than they were prior to the year 2000. People's higher incomes enabled the building of monasteries and village temples, and increased religious freedoms promoted an atmosphere in which religious scholars and specialists could flourish.

Those with knowledge of Bon tradition say that the descent of blessings is not a new phenomenon, but was widespread in Reb gong before the Cultural Revolution. Nyi ma said that the descent of blessings is explained in the transmission of Dbal gzas entitled *Shes rab glog gi dbang 'phrin* and a text from a compendium *Rdzogs chen yul gru tha sad* entitled *Mkha' 'gro rin chen phreng ba'i rgyan*.⁶⁸ He said that these texts describe how, during the descent of blessings, people's facial expressions change, and how people may dance, jump, cry, laugh, or say *gtam med kyi tshig* 'meaningless words'.

The descent of blessings is said to have been widespread in Reb gong during the time of Skyang sprul lung rtogs rgya mtsho⁶⁹ and Bon rgya sku skyes nam mkha' rgya mtsho.⁷⁰ Many *bon gshen* became ecstatic when Skyang sprul lung rtogs rgya mtsho came to Reb gong in 1944 to attend Chos thog chen mo.⁷¹ The same happened when these two *bla ma* gave *dbang lung* 'empowerments'. I was told that on at least one occasion, those who experienced the descent of blessings did so spontaneously and continuously until the *bla ma* ordered them to stop.⁷²

However, after 1958, the descent of blessings was not seen again until 1999, when a monk from Bon brgya Monastery in Reb gong experienced the descent of blessings while A lags Bon brgya was giving an empowerment. Everyone was shocked to see this. Many said that the monk must have been ill and needed to be taken to hospital. However, the *bla ma* confirmed that the man was not sick, but experiencing the descent of blessings. He also said that this was very good, splashed the man with blessed water, and said that no one should restrain the monk, because doing so might make him sick with *grib*.⁷³ Nonetheless, even at present, many people try to restrain their relatives from going into trance, as most of them think it is

⁶⁸ I have not had the opportunity to examine these monastic ritual texts.

⁶⁹ A disciple of Shar rdza rin po che (1859-1934) (Acchard 2008:5,109).

⁷⁰ A *bla ma* from Bon brgya 'brog Village. I was unable to verify his birth and death dates.

⁷¹ Exact date unknown.

⁷² Interview with informant Nyi ma, October 2011, Rong bo Town.

⁷³ This common sickness is caused by eating, wearing, or touching people or things considered to be unclean.

shameful to behave in such ways in public.

After this incident, the descent of blessings spread rapidly. Monks began to experience it, then *bon gshen*, and finally laypeople. I now describe my observations of several Chos thog chen mo rituals from 2009 to 2011, and the descent of blessings that occurred there.

First Observation. Gling rgya bon tshang ma Village. October 2009.

At around one p.m., people gradually began gathering in the temple courtyard. At about two-thirty p.m., the conch blower summoned the *bon gshen* to the assembly hall and they began chanting. As they chanted, different preparations for the afternoon ritual dance were made in the courtyard, including chalking out the performance area, arranging seating for the *bon gshen*, and bringing out flags.

Eventually, the first part of the ritual dance took place and concluded with the *bon gshen* seated on both sides of the entrance of the main assembly hall and the two monastic disciplinarians seated on higher seats. Later, A lags Bon brgya joined them, and sat on the throne in the center.

Male audience members assembled on the right side of the main assembly hall. Female audience members and children gathered on the left and on both sides of the temple's main entrance. Villagers told me that there were few spectators from other villages because people were busy doing side-jobs to earn money at that time.

Afterwards, the main ritual dance took place. Towards its end, a dancer dressed as Sgra bla'i rgyal mo entered. To greet her, *bsang* offerings were made; conch shells, shawms, and the great trumpets were blown; drums and cymbals were sounded; firecrackers were set off; and wind horses were thrown into the air. Sgra bla'i rgyal mo sat on a low table covered with felt, flanked by skeleton dancers on either side of the table. Numerous men offered *kha btags*. Four *bon gshen* stood beside her and read out her *bskyed pa* 'generation text'. Some people prostrated to Sgra bla' rgyal mo.

Several *bon gshen* and audience members began experiencing the descent of blessings. The first was a young woman of about thirty.

She emerged from a group of women standing to the left of the temple courtyard's main gate. Her body began shaking, she began making ritual gestures, danced into the inner space of the dance ground, and danced several cricles in a counterclockwise direction around the *zlog gtor* at the center of the chalk circle, within which the masked dances had been taking place. About six or seven female spectators reacted by shaking, prostrating, and calling out, "*Rtsa ba'i bla ma* 'Root *bla ma*!' "*Bla ma rin po che* 'Precious *bla ma*!' " and "*Sgra bla'i rgyal mo*!" Some elderly women began prostrating and proclaiming, "Truly *Sgra bla' rgyal mo* has come!"

A man in his late thirties then also began shaking. As his trance became more pronounced, he began calling out, "*Sgra bla'i rgyal mo stag ri rong*!" and moving into the chalk circle, but did not circle the *zlog gtor*. One *bon gshen* ensured that the man did not approach the dancer representing the deity too closely, and guided him back to the edge of the chalk circle. The men there held him under his arms, and he swayed from side to side as the woman in trance continued to dance with *Sgra bla'i rgyal mo*. His ecstasy subsided soon after that of the woman, who then returned to her mother and sister.

As the mother tidied her daughter's clothing, I heard her gently chide the young woman, asking why she had behaved like that in public. The woman cried, replying that she had been out of control, and could not have acted otherwise. The events ended with the *zlog gtor* being carried out through the main temple entrance.

Second Observation. Khyung po Village. January 2010.

As was the case in Gling rgya bon tshang ma Village, at around one p.m., conch shells were blown to summon the *bon gshen*. Some younger men climbed onto the temple roof with their offerings, made a *bsang* offering, threw windhorses into the air, and set off firecrackers when the ritual dance was about to start. After making their offerings, they watched the ritual dance from the roof.

The *bon gshen* were seated in front of the main assembly hall,

having completed their first dance. The older men were on the right of the main assembly hall. Women and children were on the left, and on both sides of the main entrance of the temple.

The main dance started after the first dance. About twenty minutes into the main dance, spectators from other villages rushed to the Khyung po Temple to see the ritual dance. Some audience members informed me that a basketball competition in the village had just finished, and people had then come to see the dance. Spectators were calm during the first hour of the dance.

About an hour into the performances, all the dancers entered, led by two Gshin rje, and began circling counterclockwise. Several spectators began to experience the descent of blessings. The first was the woman I had seen during my first observation in Gling rgya bon tshang ma Village. She began shaking and looked around among the spectators, as if to ensure that nobody was watching her. After a few minutes, she started to lose control of herself, began making ritual gestures with her hands, danced into the inner space of the dance grounds, and joined the dancers. She danced similarly to Sgra bla'i rgyal mo, though her movements were quicker than those of the other dancers. After circling the dance ground three or four times, she returned to her seat and tried to calm down. Several *bon gshen* then experienced the descent of blessings and joined the dancers. Their movements were quite slow, and they constantly called out, "Stag ri rong!" Several young women displayed similar behavior, and the first woman I just described became ecstatic again and rushed to join the dancers. Then, all the dancers exited and the spectators became calm.

It was the first time many spectators had seen the descent of blessings, and they were very surprised. Most paid no attention to the dancers, but only watched those experiencing the descent of blessings. Some asked why the *bon gshen* ignored the woman who danced like Sgra bla'i rgyal mo. "We feel she is really the deity," they said.

About half an hour later, a dancer representing Sgra bla'i rgyal mo entered and was greeted with *bsang* offerings and firecrackers, the great trumpets were blown, and drums and cymbals were played. Sgra bla'i rgyal mo sat on a low table and her generation text was read out. People offered *kha btags* and prostrated to her. About fifteen

spectators began experiencing the descent of blessings. Most were repeating, "Root *bla ma*," "Precious *bla ma*," or "Sgra bla'i rgyal mo," while placing their palms together and raising their hands to their foreheads. Some cried loudly, including three or four young girls who were about fifteen years old.

One woman said, "What's happening to these girls?" and added that they must have mental problems. The woman described above who had been the first to experience the 'descent of blessings' danced into the inner spaces of the dance ground, while the dancer representing Sgra bla'i rgyal mo remained seated on a low table.

The Sgra bla'i rgyal mo dancer soon began dancing. A girl of about fifteen experienced the descent of blessings and moved into the ritual space, but stayed at the edge of the chalk circle and made very graceful ritual gestures while singing incomprehensibly using a folksong melody. The dancer representing Sgra bla'i rgyal mo was still dancing, as was the woman. By this time, she was making different movements, alternatively prostrating and hopping from one foot to the other. One older *bon gshen* brought out a long bolt of yellow silk from the *btsan khang*,⁷⁴ put it around her neck, and tied it under her right arm.

Next, a boy of about eighteen rushed into the inner spaces of the ritual dance ground and began dancing furiously. Several *bon gshen* tried unsuccessfully to restrain him. However, after dancing in several frenzied circles, he collapsed on the ground with his palms together. At this time, several *bon gshen* came and lifted him up from under his armpits. He swayed from side to side as the woman and the young girl continued dancing with Sgra bla'i rgyal mo.

Most people returned to normal soon after the dancers exited, but the young girl remained ecstatic, apparently until the next morning.⁷⁵ Her family later reported that they had needed to stay awake all night, because the girl insisted on going to the village temple several times. She cried very loudly and called, "Mother, I

⁷⁴ A house where protector deities are enshrined. In Khyung bo Village statues of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo and Gnam lha are enshrined in the *btsan khang*.

⁷⁵ Interview with a member of the girl's family.

miss you very much!" when she entered the main assembly hall. The next morning her parents took her to A lags Bon rgya who gave her a blessed thread, thus terminating the descent of blessings.

Third Observation. Rgyal bo ngo mo Village. January 2011.⁷⁶

The seating arrangements in Rgyal bo ngo mo Village were the same as in the two villages described above. Sgra bla'i rgyal mo was greeted in the same way. Only men experienced the descent of blessings at the appearance of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo. The first was a *bon gshen* in his thirties. As Sgra bla'i rgyal mo entered the ritual dance ground, this man rushed into the chalk circle and danced. Sgra bla'i rgyal mo made three circles around the courtyard and sat on a low table. Four *bon gshen* read out her generation text and men stood in line to offer *kha btags* to her.

The second person to become ecstatic was a man of about twenty, who was standing in the line to offer *kha btags* to the dancer representing Sgra bla'i rgyal mo. He first cried out loudly, and then rushed into the chalk circle to dance. At this point, another man of about forty rushed into the chalk circle and danced furiously with him. He tried to stamp on the *zan ling* several times and two *bon gshen* came, held him by his arms, and guided him to the edge of the circle. Another *bon gshen* in his forties rushed in front of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo, who was seated on the low table. Another young *bon gshen* prostrated to Sgra bla'i rgyal mo, knocking his forehead hard on the ground, while two other men danced amid the crowd.

Sgra bla'i rgyal mo slowly rose from her seat and began circling the *zlog gtor* counterclockwise. The man who had tried to trample the *zan ling* was being held by two men at the edge of the chalk circle. He was still moving furiously, sometimes making ritual gestures, and sometimes raising his prayer beads above his head. However, after four or five minutes he placed his palms together,

⁷⁶ This information is based on video footage that was taken by my husband who visited the village to observe the ritual dance on that day.

raised them above his head, and his ecstasy subsided. At this point most of the others experiencing ecstasy also returned to normal.

Compared to the situation in other villages, those who experienced the descent of blessings in Rgyal bo ngo mo exhibited freer movements, because they were less restrained by their fellow villagers. People fell in and out of ecstasy and then sat calmly. Nobody seemed shocked. This phenomenon did not seem to be regarded as unusual.

Fourth Observation. Rgyal bo a rgya sting Village. October 2011.

I observed the whole ritual in this village, including the descent of blessings, during the ritual dance and during the chanting. During the chanting, three or four *bon gshen* experienced the descent of blessings and began making various wrathful ritual gestures. Some knelt while they did so, but most remained sitting. In addition, one woman in her forties, who was the wife of the second day's enthroned *bla ma*, became ecstatic when the *tshogs rdzas* 'feast offering' was brought to the village temple. Three young girls from her family tried unsuccessfully to hold and calm her. An elderly woman said to them, "Do not hold her." She made very graceful gestures for five or six minutes, returned to normal, left the temple, and returned after about ten minutes and seemed very calm.

On the third day, three *bon gshen* and four laymen became ecstatic at the appearance of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo, particularly as her generation text was being read. They trembled and made ritual gestures.

A dancer representing Sgra bla'i rgyal mo also experienced the descent of blessings, which could be discerned from his quick movements and shouts. At first, the musicians appeared unsure if they should continue accompanying the dance. Then A lags Bon brgya, who was sitting on the second floor of the temple, gave the signal to play music and the musicians played as usual and the dancer danced as usual. During the dance, A lags Bon brgya and others threw windhorses. The dancer was still ecstatic when the dance was due to

conclude. Two *bon gshen* supported him under his arms and brought him to the main assembly hall. After a while, his ecstasy subsided.

A woman in the audience told me that if the dancer is faithful and avoids such polluting things as killing and sleeping with his wife for a month before the ritual dance, there is a good possibility that they will become ecstatic while dancing. This, however, is considered to be a rare occurrence. The villagers claim that only one other dancer (from Rgyal bo ngo mo Village), had ever become ecstatic while dancing. In addition, a dancer representing Sgra bla'i rgyal mo became ecstatic during the dance in Bon brgya Monastery on 21 October 2010. Some said that the dancer was not dancing on the ground, but in the air.

In addition to these observations, I conducted three interviews with people who had experienced the descent of blessings.

Interview One⁷⁷

The first time I experienced the descent of blessings was when our village held a ritual called Ten Thousand Lamps (*khri mchod*)⁷⁸ in 2007. I had an inexpressible feeling of *dad pa* 'faith' when I saw the lamps, which reminded me of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo. The women were having a *smyung gnas* 'fasting ritual'⁷⁹ during those two days.

I can't remember everything that happened, but people said that I jumped quite high with my legs crossed. I felt very sore and tired when I returned to normal, and my legs were covered in bruises. Unexpectedly, however, the bruises were gone the next morning and I felt very comfortable.

Since then, I experience the descent of blessings whenever there is an important ritual. There are several key

⁷⁷ Female (b. 1978) interviewed October 2011.

⁷⁸ This is a ritual during which 100,000 lamps are offered and ritual texts are chanted.

⁷⁹ A two-day fasting ritual performed mostly by women. The performers eat lunch without meat, garlic, or onion, and only drink milk tea for both breakfast and dinner on the first day. They fast on the second day.

things that cause it. I feel as if my name is being called whenever I hear people reciting the expiation of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo, or when I see the *thang ka* of Byams ma. I feel strong faith and I have a very strong sense of compassion. In addition, I completely lose control when I see Sgra bla'i rgyal mo during the ritual dance. First, my energy channels feel *rtsa rud pa* 'numb' and then, when I experience the descent of blessings, my whole body goes numb. I am aware of what I am doing, but I am not in control. I feel very angry when people try to restrain me. Some time later, I suddenly return to normal when I become aware that everyone is watching me.

When I asked her why she was always the one who experienced the descent of blessings, she replied:

I think the most important thing is that you should have strong faith. If you have faith, then the protector deity (Sgra bla'i rgyal mo) will always take you under her protection. I also know this from a dream I have, in which a smiling, nomad woman riding a black mule comes to me. I think that it is also because of my family background. All my ancestors venerated Sgra bla'i rgyal mo and my family also owns her mask.⁸⁰ My grandmother often recited the expiation of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo and had strong faith in her. After Grandmother passed away, she appeared beside the pillars when our village temple was being built in 1982. My villagers believe that her appearance at that time was a manifestation of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo.

Interview Two⁸¹

The first time I experienced the descent of blessings was when I returned to my parents' home during the New Year in 2008 and watched a movie that showed how *bla ma* from Sichuan Province practice religion. In particular, I saw a *bla ma* on retreat who only ate plants growing on the mountain. I felt deep admiration and faith when I saw that. Then, my whole body went numb and I became ecstatic. I don't remember anything clearly, but later, my family told me that I asked them to bring a wooden sword that

⁸⁰ Owning a deity mask is comparable to owning its statue. It is placed in the shrine room, offerings are made, and it is prostrated to.

⁸¹ Female (b. 1979) interviewed July 2011.

was kept in our shrine, which had been passed down from our ancestors. They said I cried for a while when they gave me the sword. I then said I had missed the sword very much. Since then, I become ecstatic whenever there are religious rituals. I especially lose control at the appearance of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo during the ritual dance. My sisters and nieces fall into trance whenever a ritual takes place at our home, but my brother always scolds us and says we are missing energy channels.⁸² When all of us become ecstatic at the same time, he sometimes gets so angry that we suddenly return to normal.

When I asked her the same question, as to why she thought that she was always the one to go into a trance, she replied with a similar answer as the previous interviewee:

I recite the expiation of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo every day and I often dream about a black mule.⁸³ I also think this is related to my family background because previous generations of my family, including my father, were *chos pa rnam dag* 'faithful religious practitioners'.

Interview Three⁸⁴

I became ecstatic at the appearance of Sgra bla'i rgyal mo during the ritual dance in 2008. Since then, it happens quite often, especially when I prostrate in the morning and evening, and when A lags Bon brgya gives empowerments. When I am about to become ecstatic, my whole body becomes numb, I experience a strong pressure that feels like air in my belly, and I feel great compassion in my heart. I have some feeling while I am ecstatic, for example, I can feel other people touching me, but I am barely conscious of what I am doing.

I think the most important thing that causes people to become ecstatic is their faith. Those who become ecstatic are mostly women, because they have very kind hearts and their faith is very pure.

⁸² 'Missing energy channels' is a phrase used to describe people who are excitable and easily lose self-control.

⁸³ Sgra bla'i rgyal mo is believed to ride a black mule. Dreaming of a black mule suggests that they are under Sgra bla'i rgyal mo's protection.

⁸⁴ Male (b. 1978), interviewed July 2011.

I also interviewed several people who have witnessed, but not experienced, the descent of blessings.

This is a totally new phenomenon. I am now over eighty years old but I have never seen such things in my life. I do not know what it is, but I feel that it is quite mysterious.⁸⁵

I heard there are many female *lha pa* 'spirit mediums' in Bon villages. I have never heard of or seen such things in my life. I think it is either a sign that the Bon religion will prosper in the future or that it will disappear.⁸⁶

My eyes fill with tears when I see people fall into trance. It reminds me that it is understandable that people have so much suffering in life, because I can see that the deities also have their own suffering, as many of those experiencing the descent of blessings cry a lot during trance.⁸⁷

This trance phenomenon proves to me that our Tibetan belief in deities and ghosts is true. In addition, it proves to me that as long as we have faith, deities will always protect us.⁸⁸

This phenomenon is very much like *lha pa* in other villages. The only difference is that most of them are women, which is interesting.⁸⁹

This is the first time I have seen this phenomenon. I felt that it was very interesting and mysterious, and it proves at least one thing to me: that there are *gzugs med kyi sems can* 'formless beings'.⁹⁰

Those people are missing *rtswa mi tshang* 'energy channels' and so they have such experiences.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Interview with a Buddhist woman (b. 1930s) from Khyung po Village in 2008.

⁸⁶ Interview with a Buddhist man (b. 1940s) from Ska bar ma Village in 2009. The people who experience the descent of blessing and *lha pa* are similar in the terms of losing self-control.

⁸⁷ Interview with a Bon woman (b. 1990s) in 2010.

⁸⁸ Interview with a Bon woman (b. 1970s) in 2010.

⁸⁹ Interview with a Buddhist man (b. 1980s) in 2010.

⁹⁰ Interview with a Buddhist man (b. 1980s) in 2011. When people see *lha pa* and people expressing themselves ecstatically, they feel that a deity is present, thus proving that formless beings exist.

⁹¹ Interview with a Buddhist man (b. 1950s) in 2008.

Figure 3. A young man in an ecstatic state is restrained.



Figure 4. A woman in an ecstatic state is supported.



CONCLUSION

In this article I first introduced the history of Bon in Reb gong, and then described the biannual Chos thog chen mo ritual that is associated with the descent of blessings, including the various other names of the ritual, its history, date, outcome, participants, and the ritual dance on the third day. I then addressed the article's main focus, 'the descent of blessing' including its recent history, its history before 1958, and local people's explanations of the phenomenon. I provided several observations to examine the descent of blessings in context, and first-person accounts of experiencing the descent of blessings.

The only explanation that I have heard for the descent of blessings is that people's faith is pure and a *bla ma* has great power to bless people. Does this mean that Buddhist *bla ma* lack power to bless people or do those who believe in Buddhism lack pure faith? Why has this phenomenon become popular at this particular time? Why does it mostly influence women? Is it because Sgra bla'i rgyal mo is female? What may happen in the future? Will this phenomenon continue? Why? Will it spread? There are many unanswered questions. Hopefully, other perspectives on the descent of blessings will be presented in the future, based on more in-depth and comprehensive research.

APPENDIX ONE: DEITIES DEPICTED IN THE CHOS THOG CHEN MO RITUAL DANCES

Gshin rje yab yum

Figure 5. Gshin rje yab.



Gshin rje, Yama 'Lord of Death', the judge of souls in the afterlife, and ruler of all beings is colloquially known as Chos rgyal 'Dharma King' (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975:82). Gshin rje yab yum are two dancers representing the male and female Gshin rje. They wear gowns with long, broad sleeves that resemble Chinese imperial court dress, and blue, bull-headed masks. Each mask has a hat topped with five small skulls. Each skull has jewels on top, symbolizing the deities' high rank. The first, third, and fifth jewels are blue and red, the second green and red, and the fourth is white and red. The hat has a band of green (below) and a band of red (above). The mask has two long, green horns. A golden flame is atop each horn. The face has three eyes. The third eye is vertical, is located in the center of the forehead, and has a small eyebrow. The eyebrows of the other eyes are thick and prominent. The nostrils are flared. The mouth is open in a

grimace showing the teeth, which are flat and cow-like. Inside the mouth, the tongue is curled up at the tip. The female Gshin rje wears a fierce masculine mask and has three miniature skulls.

Figure 6. Gshin rje yum.



Mchod 'bul lha mo

According to A lags Nam mkha' bstan 'dzin and Bstan pa dar rgyas, there were originally eight Mchod 'bul lha mo 'Goddesses of Offerings'. In contemporary Bon ritual dances in Reb gong, usually only two, though sometimes four, Mchod 'bul lha mo are represented. Their masks resemble children's faces, with large ears and eyes, and a small mouth with beautiful lips. The mask is topped by a red hat with a black trim. There are five multicolored jewels atop the hat. The dancers are usually boys between the ages of ten and thirteen, who are dressed in colorful skirts and silk jackets. Each boy carries a *gshang* 'flat-bell' in his right hand and a string of prayer beads in his left.

Figure 7. Mchod 'bul lha mo.



Bdud lha mo

This group consists of Lha mo, or Srid pa'i rgyal mo 'Queen of the Created World', and Bdud, or Dmu bdud 'byams. Srid pa'i rgyal mo is the most important Bon protector (interview with Bstan pa dar rgyas in Bon brgya Monastery, October 2011). Dmu bdud 'byams is an important male Bon protector deity.

Both of these dancers are dressed in long black robes. Their masks are very similar: bluish-black, with three eyes, and noses wrinkled wrathfully. Each mask is topped by a headdress with five small skulls, representing the deities' rank. Their mouths are wide open, showing their large flat teeth and four fangs. The tongue is curled up towards the palate as if making a clicking sound. They have gold beards and eyebrows.

Figure 8. Srid pa'i rgyal mo.



Figure 9. Dmu bdud 'byams.



Sgra bla'i rgyal mo

Sgra bla'i rgyal mo is colloquially known as Nag mo 'Black Female', and is popular in Reb gong Bon communities. Most Bon po in Reb gong recite her *bskang ba* 'expiation' every day. An oral account says she was once a layperson who married a man who later died. She then married another eight men, each of whom died in succession. She was thus widowed nine times, causing her great suffering and pain. Everyone in her village denigrated her. When she eventually died, it is believed that she became a demoness who brought misfortune to sentient beings. Later, Ston pa gshen rab subdued her and ordered her to become a protector of Bon (interview with Nyi ma in A rgya sting Village, October 2011).

Sgra bla'i rgyal mo's mask is black and resembles an angry man's face. It has three large eyes, the third of which is vertical and located in the center of the forehead. The nostrils, rims of the eyes, and lips are red. Sgra bla'i rgyal mo's nostrils are flared and her

mouth is wide open. Her mouth is crowded with flat teeth and four prominent fangs. Her chin is covered with a short, gold beard. Gold eyebrows flare above two bulging eyes. She wears a headdress with five small skulls and her wild, disheveled hair hangs over her face. She holds a sword in her right hand and wears a long black robe, on which many white skulls and bone ornaments are painted.

Figure 10. Sgra bla'i rgyal mo.



Rma chen spom ra

Figure 11. Rma chen spom ra.



The mountain deity, Rma chen spom ra, is the personification of a mountain range in Mgo log Prefecture, Qinghai Province. He is known to locals as A myes 'Grandfather' Rma chen (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975:210). The mask of Rma chen spom ra depicts a white, shiny male face, representing the snow-capped mountain on which he dwells. His face appears less furious than that of other deities. He has very fair skin, a black beard, and eyebrows. His mouth is closed and his lips are drawn. He has a mole on his chin. Rma chen spom ra wears a red helmet with black edges and three multicolored jewels on the front. Flags top the helmet. He wears a long robe and holds a lance in his right hand.

A bse rgyal ba

Figure 12. A bse rgyal.



A bse rgyal ba is a major protector of the *btsan* class, which are ancient Tibetan deities believed to be fiercely aggressive. They are portrayed as mounted warriors clad in armor, holding weapons. Their characteristic color is red (Kværne 1996:111).

The mask of A bse rgyal ba suggests a fat, angry man's face. It has three eyes, one of which is in the middle of his forehead. His skin is red and his nose is very large. He bares his large flat teeth, with the two fangs in the upper jaw jutting over the bottom lip. He has a golden beard and eyebrows and wears a golden helmet topped with flags and pheasant feathers.

Btsan Dmu dpon

Figure 13. Bstan Dmu dpon.



Btsan Dmu dpon involves two deities: '*Btsan*' refers to Brag btsan and '*dmu dpon*' refers to Btsan rgod hur ba. Brag btsan was born from a copper egg that resulted from the union of A bse rgyal ba and Sa srin ma mo. He has a red complexion, flaming hair, bloodshot eyes, and conch-shell teeth. He wears a helmet and a voluminous cloak of red silk. Ston pa Gshen rab bound the Brag btsan demon with an oath and appointed him to be a Bon Protector.⁹² Brag btsan wears a mask and robe identical to that of A bse rgyal ba. Dmu bdud wears a dark brown mask.

⁹² Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1975:252).

Shel khrab can

Figure 14. Shel khrab can.



Shel khrab can 'The One Wearing Crystal Armor' is known to local people as Rgyal po 'The King'. He wears a yellow mask with yellow skin.

Bya seng can

Figure 15. Bya seng can.



Bya seng can involves a deity with the head of a *skyung* 'jackdaw' and another with the head of a snow lion. They wear gowns with long, broad sleeves and hold *phur bu* 'magic daggers'.

Gza' mgo dgu

Figure 16. Gza' mgo dgu.



Gza' mgo dgu is a nine-headed deity with a snake's body from the waist down. All of this deity's nine faces are green and each face features five miniature skulls on top. The nine heads are topped by a hawk's head. Each face has a gaping mouth with four fangs. The tongue is curled upwards. The dancers wear long robes, have a large string of prayer beads around their necks, brandish a bow in their left hand, and hold an arrow in their right hand.

Keng rus

Figure 17. Keng rus.



Keng rus 'masters of the cemetery (*dur khrod*)' or 'protectors of the cemetery' (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976:78) wear a white costume with white gloves and white shoes. Sky-blue silk, and orange and red cloth pieces are stitched onto the edges of their trousers, sleeves, and jackets.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Bum pa འབུམ་པ།
 'byung bzhi འབྱུང་བཞི།
 'cham dpon འཆམ་དཔོན།
 'Dzam gling mkhas pa rgyan drug འཛམ་གླིང་མཁས་པ་རྩ་དྲུག་
 'gron dman pa'i rigs འགྲོན་དམན་པའི་རིགས།
 'gyed འགྱེད།

A

A ba ngos bzang ཨ་བ་ངོས་བཟང་།
 a khu bon po ཨ་ཁུ་བོན་པོ།
 A lags Nam mkha' bstan 'dzin ཨ་ལགས་ནམ་མཁའ་བསྟན་འཛིན།
 A lags Shes rab ཨ་ལགས་ཤེས་རབ།
 A mdo ཨ་མདོ།
 A myes rma chen ཨ་མྱེས་རྩ་ཆེན།

B

bca' yig བཅའ་ཡིག་
 Bcu pa'i sgrub chen བརྩ་པའི་སྤྱབ་ཆེན།
 Bdud lha mo བདུད་ལྷ་མོ།
 Beijing 北京
 bgegs བགེགས།
 Bka' skyong bskul ba བཀའ་སྟོན་བསྟུལ་བ།
 Bla ma rin po che བླ་མ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
 Blo bzang Ye shes བློ་བཟང་ཡེ་ཤེས།
 Bod yul ma བོད་ཡུལ་མ།
 Bon བོན།
 Bon brgya བོན་བརྩ།

Bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho བོན་བརྒྱ་དགེ་ལེགས་ལྷུན་གྲུབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
bon gshen བོན་གཤེན།
Bon po བོན་པོ།
Bon rgya Sku skyes nam mkha' rgya mtsho བོན་རྒྱ་སྤྱི་སྤྱེས་ནམ་མཁའ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Bon sku བོན་སྤུ།
Brag btsan བྲག་བཙན།
Bru བྲུ།
bsang བསང་།
bsgrub བསྐྱབ།
Bskal len ba བསྐལ་ལེན་བ།
bskang ba བསྐང་བ།
bskyed བསྐྱེད།
bskyed pa བསྐྱེད་པ།
Bstan བསྟན།
bstan bdag བསྟན་བདག།
Bstan pa dar rgyas བསྟན་པ་དར་རྒྱས།
Bstan pa'i dbang phyug བསྟན་པའི་དབང་ཕྱུག།
Bstan srung rma rgyal spom ra'i bsang mchod gong 'og gnyis བསྟན་སྲུང་མ་
རྒྱལ་སྲོམ་རའི་བསང་མཚོད་འོག་གཉིས།
Btsan Dmu dpon བཙན་དམུ་དཔོན།
btsan khang བཙན་ཁང་།
Bya seng can བྱ་སེང་ཅན།
byin བྱིན།
byin 'bebs བྱིན་འབེབས།

C

Chos kyi rgyal mtshan ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
chos pa rnam dag ཚོས་པ་རྣམ་དག།
Chos rtsa ཚོས་རྩ།
Chos thog chen mo ཚོས་ཐོག་ཆེན་མོ།
chu རྩ།

Chu khog རྩུ་ཁོག་

D

dad pa དད་པ།

Dbal gsas དབལ་གསལ།

Dbal gsas kyi sngags དབལ་གསལ་གྱི་སྒྲགས།

Dbal gsas rngam pa'i dkyil 'khor དབལ་གསལ་རྩམ་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར།

Dbal gsas rngam pa'i las rim དབལ་གསལ་རྩམ་པའི་ལས་རིམ།

dbang དབང།

dbang lung དབང་ལུང།

dbu mdzad དབུ་མཛད།

dge bskos དགེ་བསྐྱོས།

Dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།

Dge lugs pa དགེ་ལུགས་པ།

Dge sdug shan 'byed kyi gar 'cham དགེ་སྤུག་ཤར་འབྱེད་གྱི་གར་འཆམ།

dgra lha དག་ལྷ།

Dkar mo khyung gshog དཀར་མོ་ཁྱུང་གཤོག་

Dkar mo rtse rgyan དཀར་མོ་རྩེ་རྒྱན།

Dmar lam zor gyi bsgrub pa དམར་ལམ་ཚོར་གྱི་བསྐྱབ་པ།

Dom pags རོམ་པགས།

dpon དཔོན།

Dpyid chos དཔྱིད་ཆོས།

drag དྲག།

Dran pa nam mkha' དྲན་པ་ནམ་མཁའ།

Drungs rims pa Shes rab rnam rgyal རྟུངས་རིམས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ།

dung chen དུང་ཆེན།

G

G.yung drung kun khyab gling གཡུང་རྟུང་ཀུན་ཁྱེད་གླིང་།

G.yung drung phun tshog 'Jigs med dpal bzang po གཡུང་རྟུང་ཕུན་ཚོག་འཇིགས་

མེད་དཔལ་བཟང་པོ།

Gansu 甘肃

gdon གདོན།
 Gling rgya bon tshang ma གླིང་རྒྱ་བོན་ཚང་མ།
 Gnam tseng zhwa dkar gling གནམ་ཅེང་ཞུ་དཀར་གླིང་།
 Gnya' khri btsan po གཉལ་ཁྲི་བཙན་པོ།
grub thob pa གུབ་ཐོབ་པ།
 Gsang ba 'dus pa གསང་བ་འདུས་པ།
 Gser thog lce 'byams གསེར་ཐོག་ལྷེ་འབྲུམ་ས།
gshags pa གཤགས་པ།
 Gshin rje yab yum གཤེན་རྗེ་ཡབ་ཡུམ།
gtam med kyi tshig གཏམ་མེད་ཀྱི་ཆིག་
gtor ma གཏོར་མ།
gtsang གཙང་།
 Gtsod rwa གཙོད་རྒྱ།
 Gza' mgo dgu གཟའ་མགོ་དགུ།
 gzhal yas khang གཞལ་ཡས་ཁང་།
 Gzir mnan bro yi bsgrub pa གཟིར་མཎན་བློ་ཡི་བསྐྱབ་པ།
gzugs med kyi sems can གཟུགས་མེད་ཀྱི་སེམས་ཅན།

H

Hor nag ཁོར་ནག

K

Keng rus ཀེང་རུས།
kha btags ཁ་བཏགས།
 Khams gsum sa dgu ཁམས་གསུམ་ས་དགུ།
khram shing ཁམ་ཤིང་།
khri mchod ཁྲི་མཆོད།
khri pa bla ma ཁྲི་པ་བླ་མ།
 Khri strong lde btsan ཁྲི་སྤང་ལྷེ་བཙན།
 Khro tshogs ཁྲོ་ཆོགས།
 Khyung dkar tshangs pa ཁྱུང་དཀར་ཚངས་པ།
 Khyung po ཁྱུང་པོ།

Khyung po thang ལུང་པོ་ཐང་།
 Kun bzang rgyal ba 'dus pa'i dkyil 'khor ཀུན་བཟང་རྒྱལ་བ་འདུས་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར།
 Kun tu bzang po ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ།

L

Lanzhou 兰州
 las rim ལས་རིམ།
 lha ལྷ།
 lha pa ལྷ་པ།
 lha rgyal lo ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལོ།
 Lha srin sde brgyad ལྷ་སྤོན་སྡེ་བརྒྱད།
 Linxia 临夏
 lung ལུང་།

M

Ma Bufang 马步芳
 Ma Lin 马麟
 Mchod 'bul lha mo མཚོད་འབུལ་ལྷ་མོ།
 mchod g.yog pa མཚོད་གཡོག་པ།
 Mda' chen dkar mo མདའ་ཆེན་དཀར་མོ།
 Mdo smad མདོ་སྐད།
 me མེ།
 Mgo log མགོ་ལོག།
 Mkha' 'gro rin chen phreng ba'i rgyan མཁའ་འགོ་རིན་ཆེན་ཕྱེད་བའི་རྒྱལ།
 Mkhan chen bla ma shes rab rgya mtsho མཁན་ཆེན་བླ་མ་ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 Mkhar nag sku phreng མཁར་ནག་སྐུ་ཕྱེད།
 Mkhas dbang bon brgya rin po che'i gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs མཁས་
 དབང་བོན་བརྒྱ་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་གསུང་རྩོམ་ཕྱོག་བསྡེགས།
 Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།
 Mu khri btsan po མུ་ཁྲི་བཙན་པོ།

N

Ngo mo ངོ་མོ།

Ngo mo ye shes mtsho rgyal ངོ་མོ་ཡེ་ཤེས་མཚོ་རྒྱལ།

P

Pad ma rdo rje པད་མ་རྡོ་རྗེ།

Panchen པན་ཆེན།

phur bu ཕུར་བུ།

Phywa tshe g.yang gi bsgrub pa ཕྱལ་ཙམ་གཡང་གི་བསྐྱེད་པ།

Q

Qinghai 青海

R

ral ba རལ་བ།

Rdzogs chen yul gru tha sad རྩོགས་ཆེན་ཡུལ་གྲུ་ཐ་སཱ།

Reb gong རེབ་གོང་།

Reb gong bon mang phur thog stong dang dgu brgya'i bca' yig རེབ་གོང་

བོན་མང་ཕུར་ཐོག་སྟོང་དང་དགུ་བརྒྱའི་བཅའ་ཡིག།

Reb gong bon mang phur thog stong dang dgu rgya རེབ་གོང་བོན་མང་ཕུར་ཐོག་

སྟོང་དང་དགུ་རྒྱ།

Rgya gar ma རྒྱ་གར་མ།

rgya ling རྒྱ་ལིང་།

Rgya lo'i chos thog རྒྱ་ལོའི་ཆོས་ཐོག།

Rgya lo'i sgrub chen རྒྱ་ལོའི་སྐྱབ་ཆེན།

Rgyal ba'i 'dus pa རྒྱལ་བའི་འདུས་པ།

Rgyal bo རྒྱལ་བོ།

Rgyal yum byams ma chen mo'i sngags bstod རྒྱལ་ཡུམ་བྱམས་མ་ཆེན་མོའི་སྔགས་

བསྟོན།

Rje mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan རྗེ་མཉམ་མེད་ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

rlung རྩུང་།

rlung rta རྩུང་རྟ།

Rma chen spom ra མ་ཆེན་སྟོམ་ར།

Rnam mkhyen rgyal ba gshen rab la 'a zha gsang ba mdo sdud kyis
 bstod pa'i mdzad bcu རྒྱལ་པོ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལ་འཇམ་གསལ་བ་མདོ་སྡེ་གྱིས་
 བསྟོན་པའི་མཛད་བཅུ།
 Rnam shes tshogs brgyad རྒྱལ་ཤེས་ཚོགས་བརྒྱད།
 Rnga ba ང་བ།
 Rnying ma རྟིང་མ།
 Rong bo རོང་བོ།
 Rong bo dpal gyi dgon chen bde chen chos 'khor རོང་བོ་དཔལ་གྱི་དགོན་ཆེན་བདེ་
 ཆེན་ཆོས་འཁོར།
 rtsa ba'i bla ma ར་བའི་བླ་མ།
 rtsa rud pa ར་རུད་པ།
 rtsam pa ར་མ་པ།
 Rtse zhig Drung rim pa རྩེ་ཞིག་རྩུང་རིམ་པ།
 Rtse zhig stong nyid bya 'phur རྩེ་ཞིག་སྟོང་ཉིད་བྱ་འཕུར།
 rtswa mi tshang རྩ་མི་ཚང།

S

sa ས།
 Sangs rgyas sman lha'i cho ga སངས་རྒྱས་སྐལ་ལྷའི་ཚོག་
 ser phreng སེར་ཕྱེང་།
 Sgra bla'i rgyal mo སྐལ་བའི་རྒྱལ་མོ།
 sgrub rnga སྐྱབ་ང།
 Shar rdza rin po che སཤར་རྩ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
 Shel khrab can ཤེལ་ཁལ་ཅན།
 Shes rab glog gi dbang 'phrin ཤེས་རབ་གློག་གི་དབང་འཕྱིན།
 Shes rab rnam rgyal ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱལ།
 Skyabs 'gro སྐལ་པ་འགོ།
 Skyang sprul Lung rtogs rgya mtsho སྐུང་སྐུལ་ལུང་རྟོགས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 skye dman སྐྱེ་དམན།
 Skye mched bcu gnyis སྐྱེ་མཆེད་བཅུ་གཉིས།
 skyung སྐུང་།

Smad pa སྐད་པ།
Smad phyogs bon mang སྐད་ཕྱོགས་བོན་མང།
Sman ri སྐན་རི།
smon lam སྐོན་ལམ།
Smon lam sgrub chen སྐོན་ལམ་སྦྱབ་ཆེན།
Snyan brgyud a gsal 'phrul gyi lde mig stse སྙན་བརྒྱུད་ཨ་གསལ་བཟུལ་གྱི་ལྡེ་མིག་སྡེ།
Snyan bzang bon mang སྙན་བཟང་བོན་མང།
smyung gnas སྦྱང་གནས།
Sprul sku blo ldan snying po'i bsang gzhung སྤྱུལ་སྤྱོ་བློ་ལྷན་སྙིང་པོའི་བསང་གཞུང།
Sprul sku Ta pi hri tsa'i gsol 'debs སྤྱུལ་སྤྱོ་ཏ་པི་ཀྲི་ཙཱའི་གསལ་འདེབས།
spyang 'dren སྤྱན་འདྲེན།
Spyi rting 'khor lo སྤྱི་རྟིང་འཁོར་ལོ།
Spyi tshang སྤྱི་ཚང།
Stod phyogs bon mang སྟོད་ཕྱོགས་བོན་མང།
Ston chos སྟོན་ཆོས།

T

Taiwan 台湾

Tongren 同仁

Tshe dbang gzhung bzhi'i sgrub pa ཚེ་དབང་གཞུང་བཞིའི་སྦྱབ་པ།
Tshe dbang rig 'dzin ཚེ་དབང་རིག་འཛིན།
Tshe sgrub kyi gzungs sngags ཚེ་སྦྱབ་གྱི་གཞུངས་སྔགས།
tshogs 'khor ཚོགས་འཁོར།
tshogs gtam ཚོགས་གཏམ།
tshogs rdzas ཚོགས་རྩས།
Tshul khirms bstan pa 'brug grags ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་བསྟན་པ་འབྲུག་གྲགས།

X

Xiahe 夏河

Xining 西宁

Y

Yar nang bon mang ཡར་ནང་བོན་མང་།

Yi dam ཡི་དམ།

Yi dam dbang chen 'Bum pa'i dkyil 'khor ཡི་དམ་དབང་ཆེན་འབུམ་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར།

yul lha gzhi bdag ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་།

Z

zan ling ཟན་ལིང་།

Zhang zhung ma ཟང་ཟུང་མ།

Zhang zhung snyan rgyud ཟང་ཟུང་སྟན་རྒྱུད།

zhi ཞི།

zhi ba ཞི་བ།

zlog gtor རྫོག་གཏོར།

zlog pa རྫོག་པ།